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# Unlearning gender blindness: new directions in management education

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**Abstract** *This paper argues that business and management schools continue to operate a gender blind approach (or at best gender neutral) to management education, management research and the development of management theory. This echoes a pattern repeated in the practice of management, which closes down and inhibits opportunities for management to be “done differently” and for organisations to be different. Reflecting on the author’s experiences within two business schools and on their empirical research carried out over six years, the paper provides substantive arguments for the authors’ position relating to the masculine nature of management, the place of academic women in management, the male dominated processes of management education and management research and the need to place gender on the agenda in management education. The paper concludes with a call for an “unlearning” and a “rethinking” of gender blind management education and provides some examples of how this might be achieved.*

## Introduction

The widespread suggestion that mainstream management theory is more accurately labelled “male stream,” because it fails to recognise the relationship between management and gender, is known as “gender blindness” (Wilson, 1996). This paper argues that business and management schools continue to operate a gender blind approach (or at best gender neutral) to management education, management research and the development of management theory. This echoes a pattern repeated in the practice of management which closes down and inhibits opportunities for management to be “done differently” and for organisations to be different.

We argue for the need to first “unlearn” and then to “rethink”, traditional approaches to management theory, education and management practice. “To rethink requires imagination and wisdom. Rethinking, in this way requires a degree of ‘unlearning’ as we reflect upon or try to put aside conventional ways of knowing . . . It requires a reflexive ability that does not simply challenge our assumptions in the sparring and reductionist mode of much academic debate, but rather exhibits a sensitive awareness to subtlety and nuance” (Hughes and Kerfoot, 2002, p. 473).

Universities are uniquely placed to play a crucial role to enable individuals, organisations and professional bodies to critically challenge their ways of working and thinking. The danger with ignoring this role is that it leads to “impoverished learning” an anathema to the knowledge society (Bryans *et al.*, 1998). By ignoring the concept of gender in management, business and management schools magnify the choice to

collude with the status quo; simply repeating the existing management theory and practice. Management education can no longer depend on these repeated patterns, as organisations of the future require people who can think beyond the traditional paradigm. This includes rethinking management in terms of the role of men and women and valuing both.

We argue that management education should be gender aware and that it is the responsibility of business and management schools to place gender high on the agenda (Mavin and Bryans, 1999) in order to challenge the traditional perceptions of "manager equals male" (Schein and Davidson, 1993). Now is the moment to ask some awkward questions (Stanley and Wise, 2000).

Our aim in this paper is to scrutinise critically management education and research to enable a consciousness raising and to consider management, management education and theory in the context of gender blindness, gender defensiveness and gender suppression (Linstead, 2000).

### **The masculine nature of management**

Dominant and traditional forms of management have developed within a general male-dominated social context, characteristically performed or assumed to be performed, by men (Hearn, 1994). Collinson and Hearn's (1994) argument that what we call management both as the actual practice of managers and as theory, can be understood as "what men do". They argue that within a male-dominated social context dominant and traditional forms of management prevail. Korac-Kakabadse and Kouzmin (1997) note that when work organisations and management were first being formed, only men were in the workforce. They argue that this and the historical fact that for many years men were able to hold power at all levels because they were free of child bearing and rearing duties, explains why men were able to participate in all forms of socio-political life. This explains the design of organisations, cultures and structures around maleness and the production of patriarchal organisation. Wajcman (1998) agrees and notes that management is an occupation historically and culturally associated with men. It is seen as intrinsically masculine, something only men (can) do.

The model of the successful manager has historically been a masculine one and the male managerial perspective operates against aspiring women as it represents a curious absence, in fact a blackout of images of women being in senior management and performing as leaders (Ferrario, 1991). The very language of management is resolutely masculine. Organisations are then a crucial site for the ordering of gender and the establishment and preservation of male power (Wajcman, 1998, p. 7). Hearn (1994) argues that it is generally taken for granted that it is men who are managers, or who are at least the dominant group, both socially and numerically in management, and so it may be taken for granted that there is no core place for women in management.

Gherardi (1994) asks how can women equally participate when men and women in the reciprocal position, stand in a hierarchical relation where men are defined in positive language as the one and women are defined by difference, by default as the other. Women who want to succeed in management are left in the unenviable and impossible position of wishing to be both visible and indistinguishable from male colleagues with whom they want to compete on the basis of professional merit alone (Nicolson, 1996). Women are still in the minority at or near the top of organisations.



despite increased numbers, and this is another sense in which women are the "other". Tanton (1994) points out that this thinking always has as its focus the perspective of "otherness". Women managers become the other manager (Bryans and Mavin, 2003), leading to differences perceived as deficit against the male norm.

Women do not appear to have a place in traditional forms of organisation and management. Gendered processes operate on many institutional levels, from the open and explicit to more subtle forms that are submerged in organisational decisions, even those that appear to have nothing to do with gender. They include the way men's influence is embedded in rules and procedures, in formal job definitions and in functional roles in organisations (Wajcman, 1998, p. 42). Management itself has traditionally implied maleness and maleness has often carried with it managerial and leadership qualities, sometimes inherently that women are assumed by men to lack (Hearn, 1994, p. 196). Therefore, the social construction of management is one in which managerial competence is intrinsically linked to qualities attaching to men. These persistent male stereotypes of management serve to make natural and thereby help to generate a close identification between men and management.

The resulting culture is one that marginalises women and as a consequence of the domination of the management as male paradigm, women managers are out of place (Mavin, 2001) in foreign territory, "travellers in a male world" (Marshall, 1984; Wajcman, 1998, p. 50).

Kirkham (1985) argues that members of the majority do not think what it means to be a member of the minority, whereas minority group members give much thought to the meaning and effect of being in that minority and to the dynamics of the majority group. Whilst managers and management remain male or at best gender neutral within management education, the issues raised will remain the status quo within organisation.

## **Women academics in management education**

The issue of woman as academic is highly problematic (Mavin, 2001). Wilson, (1995, p. 5) argues that higher education institutions are male institutions with very limited and rigid career patterns. "If there is anywhere women professionals should be successful it is in the universities, as teaching is seen as a woman's forte and universities as meritocratic institutions" (Acker, 1980, p. 81). Davies and Holloway (1995) argue that it is tempting to regard universities as hospitable places for women, places where academic excellence and the merit of an argument are the overriding values, places where there is a detached and impartial consideration of issues. However, some would describe teaching, a profession in which women have been traditionally well represented, as a "woman's job but a man's career" (Limerick, 1991 in O'Leary, 1997). The position of academic women remains characterised by, what Sutherland (1994) calls a "pattern of advance and retreat" and Davies (1993) notes how difficult it is for women to come to terms with the "equality mystique" in higher education institutions so apparently open. Brooks (1997, p. 1) also identifies a contradiction between the liberal ideology and egalitarian aims of the academy and the reality of competitive academic careers in male dominated hierarchies, which leads to endemic sexism and racism in defence of male privilege.

Historically studies show that men have dominated the senior places in UK higher education institutions (Bagilhole, 1993; Brooks, 1997; Eggins, 1997; Morley, 1994.) The

representation of women in top academic jobs is dire (AUT, 1999), the salaries of academic women are one-fifth less than academic men (Knights and Richards, 2001) and there is evidence of endemic sex discrimination in UK universities, which demands action (Wilson, 1999). As with all male dominated arenas, women in academic institutions frequently find that they are not taken seriously by their male colleagues (Handley, 1994). This is compounded by male homosociability within academia (Morgan, 1986), which is reflected in women's subtle exclusion from the informal network. There is no doubt that academia appears to be one of the spheres in which men and masculinity are locked into one another in ways that, whether by intention or not, exclude or marginalise women and femininity (Knights and Richards, 2001, p. 13). Thus reinforcing Katila and Merilainen's (1999) argument that women are often placed in the contradictory place of being simultaneously present and absent within the academia.

The situation for women academics is compounded for women academics of management because as we have noted earlier, management is dominated by the male paradigm. The result of this male managerial perspective is that women managers tend to become sidelined or marginalised in organisations and management and organisations continue to be gender blind (Still, 1994). This gender blindness is evident within management education, which again repeats the pattern of the male norm. Part of the exclusive approach evident in management education is the role, status and visibility of women academics of management in this environment and the impact of this on management students.

An example of this comes from Mary discussing her experiences as an academic within a business school (Mavin, 2001):

When I first joined the Business School one or two female colleagues discussed their lack of progression and in particular, the sex discrimination case. As a new member of staff I did not think I was being discriminated against or prevented personally from progressing. But as time has gone on I have been on the receiving end of sexist remarks, blatant discrimination in addition to covert discrimination resulting in a feeling of disempowerment and lack of motivation.

We therefore argue that academia, like management is a male place and women academics continue to be caught in the contradictions of "bifurcated consciousness", alienated through the lack of fit between the theoretical world and experiential one (Smith, 1975). In the foreword of her book, Eggins (1997, p. xi) states that women who serve as leaders of the academic institutions confront all the issues that women executives face in any large and complex business organisation. They also confront unique issues, one of which is helping to educate new generations to a broader understanding of women's roles in organisations that have a very traditional and masculine cultural ethos. However, the unchallenged patriarchal cultures historically embedded within business schools continue to assign women academics to second place (Mavin, 2001). Thus replicating the situation for women managers in organisations and perpetuating the manager as male stereotype.

### **Gendered management research**

Nicolson (1996, p. 28) argues that the control of knowledge is being preserved by the continued exclusion of women in positions of power in academia. Indeed, Belenky *et al.* (1986, p. 5) argue along with other academic feminists that conceptions of knowledge



and truth accepted and articulated today have been shaped throughout history by the male dominated majority culture.

Acker (1980) argues that men impose their conceptualisation of the world on women, whose own experience is regarded as less valid, less convincing and a less scientific basis for understanding.

It has long been argued that men govern, administer, and manage the academic community, while women have been largely excluded from the work of producing the forms of thought and the images and symbols in which thought is expressed and ordered (Smith, 1975). Therefore, one problem for the woman academic identified by Acker (1980) is to identify gaps and distortions of knowledge in her field, while searching for alternative conceptualisations that confirm rather than deny the experiences and consciousness of women.

Thomas and Pullen (2000, p. 1) argue that research into management is almost exclusively from a gender neutral position. In terms of researching management, the dominant masculine paradigm has historically suffocated the development of new forms of knowledge emerging from alternative methodologies. From our experience, the prevalence of positivism within management research in its scientific form is primarily associated with maleness, whilst alternative approaches are perceived as less rigorous, less valid and less male. Gender blindness within management research is identifiable through editorial boards, choice of referees, referee comments and the decision of whether to publish or not and in the choice of journal targeted by the authors. An example of this gender blindness is the lack of discussion concerning the gender balance of empirical studies. Seminal, male only, American studies based on MBA students remain unchallenged and perpetuate the male stream of management research and knowledge, whilst women only populations are criticised as unbalanced and unrepresentative.

Gender analyses of management and organisation are rarely published in highly rated journal publications and are often left off business and management school's UK Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) submissions.

This has significant impact on academic careers and frustration remains with what is accepted as valid management knowledge and research. An example of this is taken from Mavin and Bryans (2002, p. 245):

Two women had an abstract accepted at a refereed conference on the condition that their all-female population was compared to a male one. The women challenged this by asking if all authors had been asked to declare the gender bias in their research. No reply was received and for this reason the women withdrew their paper and continue to relay this "story" at every opportunity in order to highlight and challenge this type of gender blindness in the academy.

This reinforces the position of Hall-Taylor (1997) who argues that academic management journals reinforce the male stream by continuing to publish management research based on the male norm or by presenting this as gender neutral. The research demonstrated that the 14 leading management journals ignored the problem of women's under representation and highlighted that women in management is not made visible, is rarely addressed in traditional academic circles or in approaches to teaching and research. This silence in the leading journals is important in that they define what is visible, discussible, achievable and identifiable within the discipline of management. Research presented in academic journals is integrated into the learning

experience as a support to teaching, as supplementary reading and to underpin development in management education. Gender neutral or the male norm in management literature therefore serves to reinforce the existing stereotypes in the learning experience and in the learning environment.

Indeed, Morgan (1981) points to the “academic machismo” that often characterises the sociological mode of production and discusses the way in which conferences, seminars and exchanges in scholarly journals seemed to be arenas not only for the practice of academic rationality but also for the competitive display of masculine skills. This “academic machismo” is also discussed by Höpfl (2000) when writing a reflective paper on work reviewed for the *Journal of Gender, Work and Organization*.

Höpfl notes that the comments of the reviewers of her work (concerning women’s writing) emphasise discipline and conformity:

I should conform, choose a more appropriate outlet or remain silent. This is a particularly thorny problem for a journal like this because it seems one can only submit to it if one is a man. The idea that one must become a man in order to demonstrate discipline in writing or, at least to conform to the appearance of male discourse is an important matter and one which deserves serious debate.

The RAE compounds this gender blindness. This exercise is now institutionalised and financially rewards universities on the basis of the quantity and quality of research output. However, this universal system of assessment takes no account of differential academic life chances that are gendered (Knights and Richards, 2001). Knights and Richards (2001) argue that there is often not a level playing field and that women in comparison with their male counterparts have domestic and child rearing responsibilities that restrict the time they can devote to academic work and building their CVs. They cite research by the AUT (2000) which shows that “men are almost twice as likely to be entered in the research assessment exercise than women” (Knights and Richards, 2001, p. 8):

The claim may be that meritocracy discriminates only on the basis of talent and effort, but it could be argued that this form of discrimination is indeed gendered; it is the outcome of generations of masculine ways of thinking and intervening in the organisation of social and political life” (Knights and Richards, 2001, p. 8).

This gender blindness is replicated throughout academic life and compounded within the processes of management education.

### **Gendered management education**

As argued, the structure, culture and position of academic women in business and management schools can be seen to perpetuate the perception that management equals male. This is supported by research demonstrating that women lecturers do not make any positive association between the characteristics of managers and those of women (Foster, 1994). Earlier research illustrates that both men and women lecturers in business and management schools stereotype the manager as male and that this is modelled to students of management, who subsequently perpetuate this stereotype in management practice (Foster, 1994). This has a direct impact on the student learning experience where in teaching, learning and development, regardless of gender, lecturers may perceive management/managers as male or gender neutral. Smith (1997) referred Hite and McDonald (1995) to illustrate the impact of this perception and

comments that a low level of gender diversity awareness among educators and learners can cause tensions in personal interactions and classroom settings, resulting in embarrassment and discomfort for the individuals affected and it can pejoratively influence the assessment of learner competence by educators.

An additional element to the gender blindness of management education is that business and management schools fail to effectively evaluate students' current perceptions and experiences of management in organisations on entry to management education. Smith (1997) comments that female and male students of management are likely to have been socialised differently, with different communication styles and they use language in different ways. However, there is little integration in "modular management education", which incorporates discussion of how students perceive managers, management and organisation when they begin a management course and therefore, these perceptions are likely to be left unchallenged.

The gender composition of teaching teams is often an indication of how gender aware or gender blind business and management schools are in relation to management education.

One example is a student's experience of her management course:

As the MBA course progressed, I became more aware of the absence of women. I never had a female lecturer and visiting speakers were always male. Gender issues were never mentioned in the sessions. If I asked questions relating to gender there were three reactions: genuine puzzlement – what did I mean; hostility – did I not understand that this was a business course which was therefore gender neutral; polite interest but no knowledge or suggestions of where I might find such knowledge (Cole, 1998).

Reflecting on Cole's (1998) experience of never seeing a woman lecturer during her MBA course, this can send a strong message to both management students and their organisations. Whilst using an all male academic team to redesign management education programmes, which will attract both men and women senior managers, sends strong messages to the academic faculty and to students who choose the course. Suzanne in Mavin and Bryans (2002, p. 246) illustrates the issue of gender blind development of management education curricula:

When the new Master of Business Administration course was developed internally, all Divisions had academics represented on this "prestigious" high status course, but none of the development team were women academics. Interestingly in my own Division while my male manager was on the development team (the public face) myself, one other woman academic and another man wrote the units and from the whole of the School only two women academics are delivering academic units to the students. More recently, this has been illustrated with the development team of the Doctorate in Business Administration, where the academic men vehemently argued against the need for a gender balanced team. When the issue was raised by a new woman Professor, one senior man commented that if they did so they would have to also consider disabled and ethnic minorities in the composition.

In terms of the "public face" of management education, continuing to send senior male academics to liaise with organisations to discuss management and organisational development perpetuates the status quo and may fail to attract women managers to management courses. By ignoring the gender issue, business and management schools may fail to reach their target audience and therefore their "customers".



## Unlearning gender blindness

Wilson's (1996) discussion of gender blindness accuses management theory of being male stream. First, because it makes little or no room for any analysis of those actual individuals who occupy the role, treating management as an abstract set of functions, principles or processes and second, because it fails to recognise gender as a significant variable, even in the face of overwhelming empirical evidence. Linstead (2000, p. 297) views this gender blindness as an inculcated way of not seeing or being unaware and argues that the "founding fathers" of management theory were very gender aware, but they actively worked to "suppress gender" in their theories. In terms of the "founding fathers", Linstead (2000) cites Matteson and Ivancevich's (1989) claim that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory is built on flawed primate research and even more flawed sexuality research and is distinctly gender biased. Yet, it has been so influential in management theory as to have become a "classic among classics".

Linstead (2000) argues that this suppression within the work of the founding fathers is as a result of an epistemological stance which reduces all difference, including gender, to either an epiphenomenal or interferential status – it was either an unwanted effect of practical variabilities or a deviant source pattern which needed to be smoothed out by the system. But which system is Linstead referring to? Is it the positivistic, scientific male system? As authors we are able to accept the argument that issues of gender are perceived by some as actively interfering with the status quo, as deviant and which need smoothing out. Indeed these are often used as arguments to post rationalise specific practices and theories.

However, Linstead (2000, p. 302) argues that while there may still be genuine pockets of gender blindness, far more reactive "gender defensiveness" and suppression are present where there is resistance to taking gender seriously.

In this paper, we have raised what we understand as gender blindness within management, management research and management education but the issue of whether this gender blindness results from not seeing, being unaware, "suppressing gender" or "gender defensiveness" (Linstead, 2000, p. 298) remains problematic.

Linstead (2000) talks of embracing gender or suppressing it, but acknowledging the motivations behind the choice and the consequences of the suppression. Rather than being "unaware" or "gender blind", in order for research and management education to suppress gender, there has to be a conscious recognition of gender issues and of the impact of the gendering of management and organisation *before* there can be a conscious choice to "suppress gender". The argument here is that business and management education is not aware or "aware enough," of the gendering processes at work to be able to make a conscious choice to suppress them. This paper has provided examples to highlight gender defensiveness and gender blindness within this context.

Alternatively, why would management education and management theory seek to consciously suppress gender? While the male model of management dominates, it continues to be a struggle against the dominant power and political dynamics in order to challenge the institutionalised gender blindness, endemic in management education.

By addressing the issues concerned with the gendered nature of management, research and education we have begun the process of "unlearning" through consciousness raising and challenging the taken for granted assumptions which underpin management education. Rethinking management education requires us to

put aside conventional ways of knowing and to explore alternatives, subtleties and nuances.

## **Placing gender on the agenda in management education**

### *Management theory and research*

Rather than a neutral set of processes we should recognise that management is not disembodied, but a situated process involving individuals who are managing and managed. Academics must critically analyse accepted theory and management practice in terms of gender rather than accepting this as gender neutral or gender blind.

There has to be a recognition by editorial boards of mainstream management journals that gender is a variable in management research and there has to be an acceptance into the mainstream of gender analyses of management. The review and refocus of the next RAE will lead to a reduction in the number of units of assessment. This may impact on the opportunities for women researchers to be entered, as argued earlier, and on the quality value that gender research in management has placed upon it in terms of ratings.

In terms of research within the process of management education, the EOC's (2000) guidance note on gender proofing research should be used with all students required to undertake research. This states; "It is our view that research which is 'gender-blind', rather than 'gender-aware' may often be bad science or of limited value, particularly if it is used to inform or formulate policy." The EOC advises that "a 'gender-aware' approach should automatically be adopted within a research project unless there is good reason not to do so" (EOC, 2000, p. 1). It is now incumbent on the research councils to stipulate this type of criteria before allocating monies for management research as these practical actions have a growing impact on the students' experience of management education and particularly on what is accepted as management knowledge.

### *Women in management*

Earlier research concerning gender on the agenda in management education (Mavin and Bryans, 1999) argues that greater visibility of women academics of management could help ensure that gender is placed on the management education agenda. In turn communicating this message to organisations via their managers – our students. Raising the profile of gender issues in organisations is inextricably linked to the profile of women employees. However, this can lead to what is a structural problem being identified as an issue for individual women to solve.

McKeen and Burke (1991) noted that the most useful activities in preparing women for managerial and professional work were to have women talk candidly about their work, career and life experiences. Examples of this within management education include supporting the development of women's networks within management courses, introducing and integrating material in courses more reflective and inclusive of women's experiences and supporting research on women in management issues. In addition, having more women faculty members, enabling their visibility within high profile courses and introducing women managers as central actors in cases and course materials can place gender on the agenda.

With reference to course materials, when describing her experiences as an MBA student Cole (1998) comments that many true case study material was used, but the



case study people were always men; this also applied to the videos, with the one exception of Body Shop and Anita Roddick. This lack of visible women role models in management education does make an impact. Singh and Vinnicombe (2003) claim that through their potential influence on the socialisation of newcomers into organisations and management, role models are a topic of research interest, particularly in the women in management field. They cite the Catalyst (2003) in Singh and Vinnicombe (2003) study of barriers to women's careers in which lack of female role models is identified as the second biggest barrier (after stereotyping) to career success. While Lockwood and Kunda (1997) found that future teachers and accountants were inspired by leaders in their professions who were the same gender as themselves.

Indeed, Singh and Vinnicombe (2003, p. 6) claim "As people seek role models as part of their career development, they often seek individuals with similar backgrounds to themselves. However, for minority individuals, including women, this can be difficult."

McKeen and Burke (1991) state that it is in the interest of business and management schools to take on board gender awareness and initiatives and that one important by-product of these may be a more satisfied and effective female management graduate in the future. Indeed, more male managers who are aware of the issues facing women in management may positively support change in relation to gender issues in organisations. Simpson (1995) argues that one way to speed up the process of change towards successful women's management education is to create an awareness and understanding of the processes that support the status quo. Developing managers, both men and women, to develop this awareness and ultimately challenge the status quo must become an important priority within management education programmes, if women are to fulfil their potential both as professionals and as managers and if organisations and the practice of management is to change.

### *Management education*

In terms of the curricula in management education by placing gender on the agenda explicitly from the beginning of a course, students are able to identify what discussions are acceptable. Making gender in management visible from the outset, allows students a gender framework for their experiences, learning and development. Katila and Merilainen (2002, p. 348) reflecting on their failed attempt to mainstream gender onto the curricula note "we felt that it was exactly at the beginning of the university studies that teaching of gender issues is needed and not as an optional choice but rather as a compulsory subject."

Reactions from students to our own attempt to enable gender discussions in management on a core module by critiquing the paper "Management, men and women, leadership and management style" (Mavin, 1998) include:

I was quite fascinated by your paper and shocked at the same time. I had never consciously felt that my own experience of managing in a local authority framework could be representative of many women in management. I have always felt that I have had to commit myself to work 110% just to survive and certainly have had to demonstrate that I am not "soft and fluffy" but more "strong and assertive".

This woman student was a senior manager for a local authority and believed that through gender discussions in class she developed a clearer understanding of her own experiences and what developments she must follow as a manager. To discuss these experiences for the first time in a class of 40 men and women was liberating and

interesting, significantly the discussions raised awareness for all involved. Responses to the paper from men students include:

I suspect that male managers tend to be task driven and tend to shy away from people issues and this has to be addressed via management development in order for the organisation to grow.

Statistics do prove that there is an unacceptable gap between the number of male and female managers but the gap is closing. I do believe that although management development and education of male managers and executives to actually recognise the potential of women in senior roles is vital, this will still be a long and difficult process.

There are still a large number of men who still hold stereotypical views that women do not belong in senior roles, but I still firmly believe that the tide has turned.

As the students were middle to senior managers, the aim is for them to continue this awareness and facilitate challenges to gender issues within their own organisations.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have outlined our processes of critical scrutiny of gender blind management, research and management education. Our reflective enquiry has enabled a critical analysis which illustrates the gendered nature of management, management education and research. Continued patterns of gender blind management education close down and inhibit opportunities for management to be “done differently”, for organisations to be different and betray the aspirations of those women who look to management education to support their development. This is of particular economic importance when women play an increasingly crucial role in twenty-first century organisations.

As authors and as women academics, we call for a critical engagement with traditional management theory and a rethinking of that theory through a gender lens. We have demonstrated the need for gender awareness in the development of new theory and research practice to avoid the continuing gender blind interpretations which then become male stream theory and mainstream in management education. It is incumbent on academic management journals to recognise and value gendered analysis by becoming critically aware of alternate paradigms and a rethinking of editorial panels may be required. Those business and management schools prepared to actively consider their internal structures, promotion and development practices in terms of the gender of academic staff and consider the course content and delivery methods in terms of gender awareness, can then enable a move away from the status quo, rethink management education and begin to challenge repeating patterns.

In this special issue, which particularly aimed at critical scrutiny of management educators and scholars, we have called for an “unlearning” and a “rethinking” of gender blind management education. Whilst we can also stand accused of presenting either an unwanted effect of practical variabilities or a deviant source pattern which needs to be smoothed out by the system (Linstead, 2000), we have done so in an attempt to provoke uncertainty for our audience and provide an opportunity for reflection and debate.



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